
History Painting in Modern East Asia: Reflections on a Global Art History

Stephanie Su*¹

¹University of Chicago – United States

Abstract (in French and English)

This paper explores the notion and practice of history painting on Chinese subjects in early twentieth century Japan. As an idealized cultural entity, China's past became the source of inspiration and a contested field for Japanese and Chinese artists during this tumultuous period. This paper focuses on the oil paintings by Nakamura Fusetsu (1866-1943), an artist, calligrapher and collector, whose influence was extended to China in the 1920s. Situated at the intersection of the European aesthetic concept and the East Asian narrative art tradition, Fusetsu's work demonstrated his profound reflections on what constituted East Asian culture. Past scholarship on history painting usually considered its production within the core narrative of nationalism; however, this approach undermined the historical complexities in East Asia, where frequent cultural, economic and political interactions among countries have lasted from the third century until today. Cross-referencing the visual and textual materials from Japan and China, this paper aims to reconstruct a more interconnected history of East Asian art beyond current national borders. Besides investigating the Sino-Japanese relationship, this paper also discusses Fusetsu's work in relation to European art. Moving away from the dichotomies of the center / periphery, this paper proposes a viable methodology toward a global art history.

Keywords: East Asia, History, Art, Painting

*Speaker